

# MOTH PHOTOGRAPHY

By Ali Iyoob

Moth photography is very straightforward, but still requires some knowledge of your equipment. Since most moth photography is done in the dark, or in poorly lit areas, your flash will be the primary source of light in the photo. However, the **flash can easily overpower** the moth and cause the scales to shine, which makes identification hard. To combat this, an ISO in the 200-400 range will allow the flash intensity to be set down and keep glare to a minimum. A flash diffuser either bought or homemade, also is a huge help.

If using a black light, it can be best to use a LED headlamp or flashlight, which will allow ample light for the camera to autofocus. In addition, it is critical to photograph moths with a high f-stop, usually around 13-19. This will insure the entire moth, including the edges, **remains in focus**. Shutter speed should remain fairly high, and I have found 1/180 is a good speed to ensure sharp images.

Most of the time, the background of the moth isn't a problem, if using a white sheet. However, for dark moths photographed on bark or the ground, it may be helpful to transfer the moth to something lighter and more uniform, like a backpack or even a shoe. The angle of photography can be important too, as I learned the hard way last summer. I was photographing a *Palpita* perched high on a wall, and the photos showed the moth at a very heavy angle. When I tried to identify the moth later, it proved to be impossible, as the leading edge of the wing was hidden from view. Shooting the moth at a **straight angle** eliminates the problem, and makes the photo look much better.

Point-and-shoot cameras are much simpler to use, but don't get as much detail on smaller moths. Be



sure with a point-and-shoot that the flash doesn't overpower the moth, and if possible use the "macro" setting. Tripods aren't necessary while shooting moths, and often can scare moths on the sheet if the leg of the tripod bumps the sheet.

It's a good practice to **label** your photos with both the common and scientific names, as well as the four or five digit Hodges number. Also include the full date and county which will be useful for submitting records and for distribution data.

